

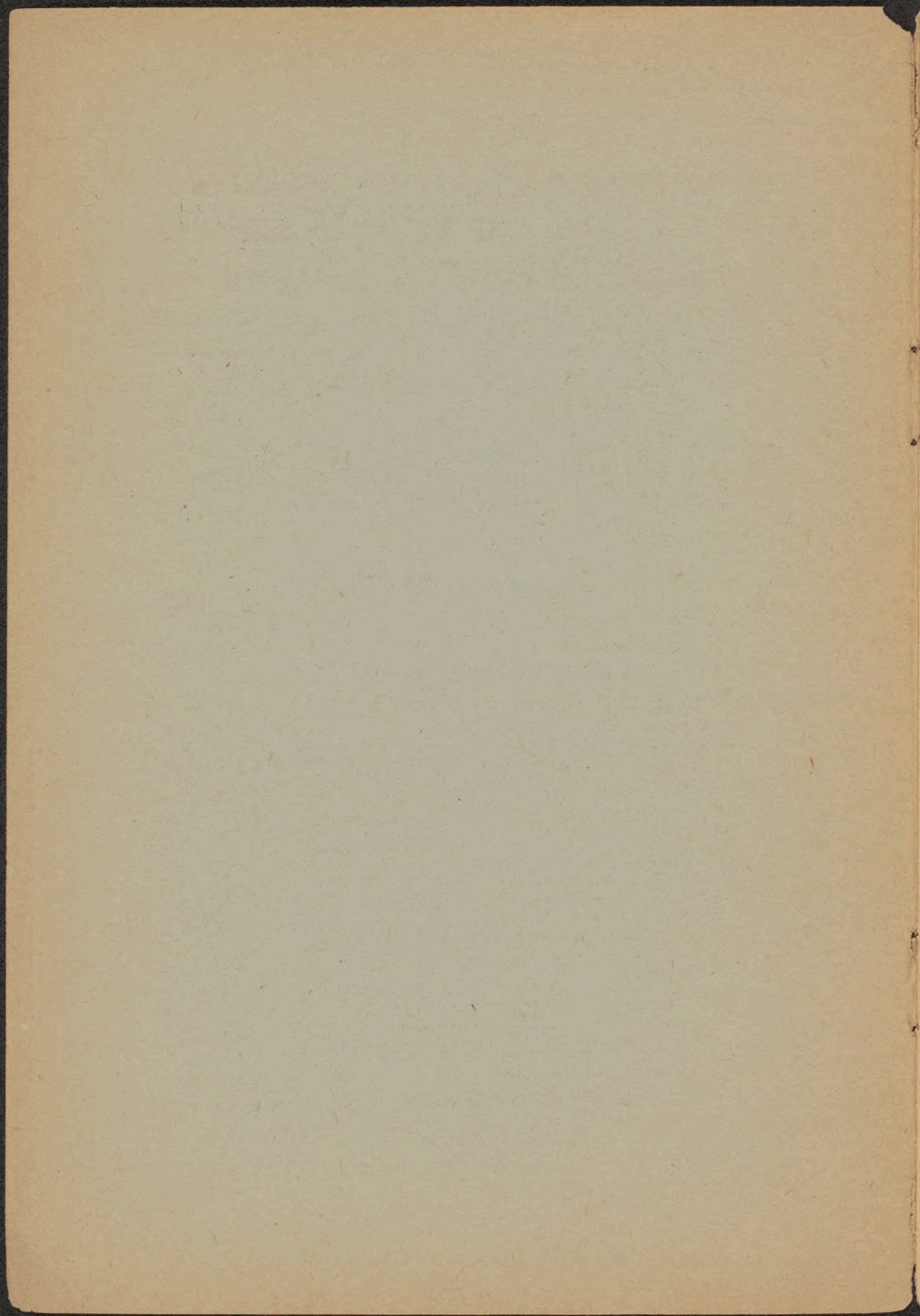
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THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART,
WASHINGTON, D. C. ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁



atalogue of an Exhibition
of Tapestries, belonging to
Mr. Charles M. Ffoulke, of
Washington, D. C. ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁

December 14,
1897



PRELIMINARY NOTE ON THE ORIGIN, HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE OF THE TAPESTRIES EXHIBITED.❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖

Five of these tapestries issued from the ateliers established in Rome by Cardinal Francois Barberini under the ægis of his uncle Pope Urban VIII, and one was woven in the Gobelins during the reign of Louis XIII of France. The Cardinal was for some years Papal Legate at the French Court, and during that period became so enraptured with the magnificent tapestries which decorated the palaces of her monarch, with those which King Louis XIII presented him, and with those which he bought personally, that upon his return to Rome he founded in that city a manufactory of them, in order that the Barberini Palace and Vatican might also be liberally adorned with them. He appointed Jacques de la Riviere, Superintendent, and Jean Francois Romanelli, Purveyor of Cartoons. They began work about the year 1633, were compelled to close the establishment upon the death of Pope Urban VIII and the banishment of his nephews, and were unable to reopen it until about the year 1660. Five of the tapestries in this series were woven therein before the banishment of the founder, and bear the signature of Jacques de la Riviere. Two of the cartoons were certainly painted by Romanelli, one by Rubens, one by Cortona, one by Neapolitan, and the authorship of the remaining one is attributed by some to Romanelli and by others to Cortona.

All the tapestries composing this series are enriched with gold and silver threads. They possess great historic

value, since they have belonged for about 250 years to the Barberini of Rome; they all rank high, artistically, since they were woven by eminent master weavers after cartoons by celebrated artists, and were rated as antique objects of art, subject to export tax. None of them have ever been mutilated in any way, and all are among the most important and valuable XVIIth century tapestries in existence.

Notwithstanding Mr. Ffoulke's long residence abroad and the many and important acquaintances and friendships which he made in Europe, it would have been impossible for him, or any other foreigner, to have obtained the permission of the Italian Government for the exportation of the renowned Barberini Collection of tapestries, and this permission was therefore procured by the powerful friends and connections of the Princess Barberini. The experts chosen by the Italian Minister of Public Instruction to examine the collection, reported that all the series of tapestries ranked as works of art, consequently the tax of twenty per cent. required by the Italian Government on the exportation of antique works of art from Rome has been paid on every one of the series comprising this collection. To each tapestry the Italian Minister of Public Instruction has affixed his official seal, as evidence that the Government has not only consented to its exportation, but that the Pacca or export tax on it as an antique work of art has been paid. Without these seals the tapestries would have been stopped at the frontier by the Custom-House authorities, and not allowed to leave Italy, and the would-be exporters would have suffered other disagreeable consequences, both financial and personal.

By the assistance of his friends, some of whom are in the Direction of the Royal Galleries of the Uffizi at Florence, Mr. Ffoulke had every one of the Barberini tapestries examined by the experts of those renowned galleries, and had

affixed to each one the seal of the Uffizi in further recognition of their great artistic value and as further identification that they had paid the export tax heretofore mentioned.

CONSTANTINE.

HISTORICAL NOTE.

Constantine the Great was born about 274 A. D. and was the first Christian Emperor of Rome. His majestic presence, personal courage and commanding abilities made him the idol of the army, and a dangerous rival to the reigning emperors, long before his accession to the purple. In early manhood he followed the example of many other Roman nobles and several emperors, who fought with wild beasts and gladiators in the amphitheatres before thousands of applauding spectators.

He married the daughter of the Emperor Maximian, about 307 A. D., but soon became embroiled in a war with his august father-in-law, which ended in the latter's defeat and death. There were six emperors of the Roman world at this era, but Constantine determined to reign supreme and alone. In 312 A. D. he fought a great battle near Rome with the Emperor Maxentius, in which this rival was overwhelmed and slain. He then entered the Eternal City, disbanded the Prætorian guards, destroyed their camp, and assumed the title of "Pontifex Maximus." It was during this war that the traditional miracle occurred which was the reputed cause of his conversion to Christianity. A flaming cross appeared to his inspired vision, in the sky at noon-day, which, according to Eusebius, bore the motto, "In

hoc signo vinces," *i. e.*, "By this sign thou shalt conquer." In conspicuous obedience to the imputed command of God, he then embraced Christianity, announced his conversion to his troops, exhibited to them the Labarum, declared that this prophetic standard created him vicegerent of God on earth, and predicted that under it he would lead them to continuous victories.

Some authorities assume that he never became a Christian at heart, and insist that the legendary conversion was acknowledged solely to convince his soldiers that his arms would thenceforth be invincible. Although they may question whether he was sincere or not, since he made no effort to suppress pagan worship, yet it is certain that he favored the Christians openly, personally aided in the destruction of idols and other emblems of the heathen deities, and recognized the Christian religion as that of the state.

In 323 A. D. he routed near Adrianople the Emperor Licinius, who was then the sole survivor of the several emperors who originally divided the sovereignty of the Roman world with him. He personally laid siege to Byzantium, and ordered his eldest son, Crispus, to force the Hellespont. The latter, after a terrible naval struggle which lasted two days, defeated Amandus, the Admiral of Licinius. Byzantium surrendered, Constantine crossed into Asia, destroyed the army of his rival at Scutari, put him to death, and at last ruled the Roman Empire alone. He securely established his power and authority by wise and enlightened kingcraft, and passed the remainder of his reign in undisturbed tranquillity.

In 325 A. D. he convoked the celebrated religious council at Nicæa, as he declared, "to establish throughout his dominions some one definite and complete form of religious worship," and presided at the first meeting.

About 300 Bishops assembled, who, after prolonged, acrimonious and violent discussions, settled upon a creed which stands to this day, as the only "Catholic" or ecumenical creed ever discussed and adopted by the representatives of the universal Church. The Arian party made a bold defense of their opinions, and unsuccessfully endeavored to submit and impose their draft of another creed upon the council, but it was torn to pieces and burned.

In 328 A. D. he transferred his court to Byzantium, made that city the capital of the Roman Empire, and changed its name to Constantinople. He gave much personal attention, during several subsequent years, to enlarging, beautifying, and fortifying his beloved city, and died in 337 A. D., dividing the sovereignty of the Roman world between his three sons.

THE TAPESTRIES.

No. 1.—NAVAL BATTLE BETWEEN THE FLEETS OF CONSTANTINE AND LICINIUS IN THE BOSPHORUS. Signed IAC. D. L. RIV. Cartoon painted by Charles Neapolitan, pupil of Romanelli, and still preserved in the Barberini Palace. Height, 16 feet 4 inches. Length, 23 feet.

The first tapestry represents the celebrated naval battle in the Bosphorus between the fleets of Constantine, under the command of his son Crispus, and that of Licinius, under Admiral Amandus. All the standards of Constantine are crowned with the cross. The prows of the ships are decorated with the heads of wild beasts, those of Constantine with heads of boars, and those of Licinius with heads of lions. Both Crispus and Amandus display the eagle, because both are in command of Roman

soldiers fighting for the supremacy of their respective Emperors. It is a powerful illustration of a terrific struggle, and clearly portrays the sublime courage of the ancient Romans, no matter in what perilous positions the fortunes of war placed them. In proof of which examine the features of the three men who have quit a sinking ship and boldly swim towards their adversaries upon an uninjured one. They realize they are dreadfully overmatched by those awaiting them, but they do not hesitate to accept the risks of fighting under such fearful odds. Every face is a masterpiece in which one can clearly read the emotions which animate its owner. The Admiral has given up the struggle, as the despair in his features and in his gestures amply testifies. All the soldiers are superb specimens of fighting material—strong, athletic, well proportioned and full of vigor. Their terrible contest has been so ably interpreted that we almost hear the clang of their arms and their hoarse shouts of victory and defiance.

Every part has been well conceived and developed, beginning with the superb costumes of gold and silver threads, taking in turn the agitated water, the rolling smoke, the rising, falling or sinking ships, and ending with the drowning and fighting warriors. It is a magnificent tapestry, a chef-d'œuvre of Roman textile art worthy of a prominent place in any museum in the world.

No. 2.—CONSTANTINE BURNING THE CREED OF THE ARIANS AT NICEA. Signed IAC. D. L. RIV. Cartoon painted by Romanelli and still preserved in the Barberini Palace. Height, 15 feet 10 inches. Width, 14 feet 10 inches.

The second tapestry represents Constantine burning the Creed of the Arians at Nicæa. He thrusts it into a fire glowing upon a brazier held by a kneeling servitor. He is

crowned with laurel and wears a mantle, richly decorated with gold, over a costume interwoven with silver. His figure is majestic, but his pensive face lacks strength. All the other personages are powerfully drawn and their costumes are heavily charged with gold and silver threads. Their faces are mirrors, and with their gestures clearly portray the emotions controlling them. Cynical humility, constrained anger, rapt devotion, gratified ambition, devout thankfulness and calm contentment can be read on their countenances in the above order, beginning with the cowed monk and sweeping round the foreground to the prelate next the Emperor. The marbles in the architectural background have been beautifully reproduced, and the colors in the costumes skillfully harmonized. The whole tapestry would rank as a masterpiece if Constantine's face had more character and if the flesh tints of all the personages had not lost much more from the ravages of time than the deeper and stronger colors of their eyes and their robes.

NO. 3.—CONSTANTINE SLAYING A LION IN GLADIATORIAL COMBAT. Signed IAC. D. L. RIV. Cartoon attributed by some to Romanelli and by others to Cortona. Height, 16 feet. Width, 9 feet 6 inches.

This tapestry never had any lateral borders, having been woven originally for a narrow space like that between two windows. It represents Constantine slaying a lion in single combat, by plunging his sword through its mouth and neck, in an arena before the eyes of some excited soldiers. His figure is the embodiment of courage, power, and energy, and his costume is richly laden with gold and silver threads. Although he evidently realizes that the perilous encounter demands all his skill and strength, yet his features display

the utmost confidence in his own prowess. The lion is magnificent, from its stiffened tail to its savage head and jaws, and is certainly a dangerous antagonist, with its terrible teeth and claws and powerful limbs, ready to spring upon its foe. All the soldiers watching the scene are grouped in front of a fence, and manifest the deepest interest in the spectacle. Every one of their faces is a study. An array of heads like theirs must have been drawn from life, for invention alone could scarcely have attained such excellence. In the background there is an array of tents, spears and standards of the different cohorts.

Although there is evidence of importance that the cartoon for this tapestry was painted by Romanelli, yet the writer is unable to regard it as conclusive. He questions it because he finds that the character, style, and drawing of this tapestry vary materially from some in the Barberini collection which are, unquestionably, after cartoons by Romanelli, and from those frescoes in the Louvre at Paris which are undoubtedly by his hand. Compare the head of Constantine in this piece with the heads* of the same monarch after Romanelli in those representing the Vision of the Cross in the sky, and the Emperor burning the Creed of the Arians, and you will doubt if the same artist originated all three of them. Compare it with the one after Cortona in the tapestry representing Constantine destroying idols, and you will see that the same hand probably painted both of them, although the body of the Emperor bears a strong resemblance to some of Romanelli's productions. Compare the faces of the excited soldiers with some of the well-known works by Cortona, and you will believe that he painted the cartoon for them. In addition, Romanelli preferred classical to gladiatorial subjects, religious fervor to martial frenzy, and mental graces to physical prowess.

No. 4.—CONSTANTINE SUPERINTENDING THE CONSTRUCTION OF CONSTANTINOPLE. Signed in bottom galon and in right-hand galon. Cartoon painted by Rubens. Height, 15 feet 10 inches. Width, 15 feet 7 inches.

The fourth tapestry represents Constantine superintending the construction of Constantinople. He is crowned with laurel and wears an imperial mantle interwoven with gold and silver threads. A magnificent eagle rides the air above him, holding a laurel wreath in its beak and claws, which symbolizes that Fortune, in the guise of the principal emblem of Jupiter, continually hovers over her favorite son, and is always ready to crown him with the garland of victory. Behind him stands one of his suite, an attentive observer of the scene, and in front, the kneeling architect points out with a pair of compasses, on a plan held up to their view by a servitor, the proposed additions to the city. Constantine indicates, by the movement of his hand, the quarter of the town in which certain work shall be done, and the architect, by pointing in the same direction, signifies that he understands his monarch's instructions. To the left a sculptor chisels the decoration on column, and further off two men pry and move certain completed pieces of architecture. In the backgroud is an exquisite glimpse of Byzantium, the Sea of Marmora, and the hills along the Bosphorus. It is a powerful, well-grouped composition. The four most important personages have remarkable heads and figures, but the artists have excelled themselves in the majestic pose, clear-cut features, thoughtful eyes, and rich costume of Constantine. The grand head of the kneeling architect is evidently a portrait, for the eyes, beard, beetling brows, and earnest face have been reproduced with such signal success that they must have been taken from life. All the colors are well preserved, even

the flesh tints have almost retained their original strength. It is, in conclusion, a museum tapestry and ranks among the most celebrated of the era of Louis XIII, as would be expected from the renowned abilities of the artist who painted the cartoon, and the illustrious reputation of the establishment in which it was woven.

No. 5.—CONSTANTINE CONTEMPLATING THE FLAMING CROSS IN THE SKY. Signed IAC. D. RIV. Cartoon painted by Romanelli. Height, 16 feet. Width, 11 feet 3 inches.

The fifth tapestry represents Constantine, crowned with a laurel wreath, standing upon an elevated platform and contemplating the refulgent cross in gold which blazes in the sky and which is evidently invisible to the soldiers about him, since they are completely absorbed in his words and actions and show neither excitement nor alarm. Both loyalty and devotion are strongly imprinted upon their features, which are unfortunately somewhat faded by the ravages of time. The face of Constantine is positively beautiful, and wears an inspired expression as he gazes far beyond the soldiers grouped around him and apparently peers into futurity. His superb costume is richly interwoven with gold and silver threads, but scarcely excels in magnificence that of the officer in the foreground. All four of the heads in full view are capitally interpreted. The cross looks as if woven entirely in gold, and its brilliant rays illuminate the sky in all directions.

No. 6.—CONSTANTINE DESTROYING IDOLS AND REPLACING THEM WITH CHRISTIAN STATUES. Signed IAC. D. L. RIV. Cartoon painted by Cartona, and still preserved in the Barberini Palace. Height, 15 feet 10 inches. Width, 12 feet 2 inches.

The sixth tapestry represents Constantine, crowned with laurel, replacing a dethroned idol, in a heathen temple, with

the statue of a Christian prelate. It is doubtful if Cortona ever produced any heads in oils (and he created many wonderful paintings,) which excel in artistic excellence that of the great Emperor in this tapestry and those of the two priests in his suite. The Monarch is also attended by an acolyte bearing a huge cross, and by two servitors who carefully place, under his guidance, the image of a Catholic prelate offering benediction, upon the pedestal from which a pagan deity has been deposed. Constantine shows his derision of the power ascribed to idols by placing his foot upon a piece of the one lying broken upon the floor. The admirable architecture, the graceful lamps, the toiling servitors, the remarkable features of Constantine and the priests who attend him, their well-proportioned figures, their magnificent costumes, richly interwoven with gold and silver threads, and the idealistic interpretation of the composition, combine to render this one of the most important tapestries in the Barberini collection.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BORDERS.

In the centre of the top border of all six of these tapestries is a rose cartouch, which encloses a medallion of flowers encircling the letters XP in gold. In the same position in all the bottom borders is a similarly shaded cartouch which encloses, in five, two branches of laurel upon a gold ground, and in the sixth, an eagle with spreading wings, carrying a serpent in its beak.

To the right and left of the central decorations in the top borders are bunches of palm sprigs and flowers, and beautiful cornucopias of fruits, flowers, and leaves, all gracefully intertwined with blue scarfs having knotted and tasseled ends. No side borders were ever woven on the third tapestry, and its top border and that of the second are

enriched, in excess of the others, with the busts of sphinxes. In each of the four corners, of five, is a polychrome cartouch, two of which enclose heads of men, and two, heads of women, the latter with serpents twined about them. There is also a polychrome cartouch in the centre of all the lateral borders, which encloses an escutcheon emblazoned in eight of said borders, with a golden Barberini bee upon a blue ground encircled by two sprigs of laurel, and in two of said borders, with the fleur-de-lis of France on the dexter side, and with the arms of Navarre on the sinister, both encircled by the collar of the royal French order of the Holy Spirit, with its pendant cross. The princely crown of Barberini rests upon the top of each of the lateral cartouches, in four of the tapestries, and the Royal crown of France upon each of those in one. From the centre of all these crowns spring two palm branches, tied with blue ribbons enveloping a bouquet of flowers, which is suspended by ribbons from the decoration in the upper corners. Beneath these cartouches hang, tied together by blue ribbons and interwoven with gold and silver threads, a bouquet of flowers, two palm branches and two trumpets. The dark background throws out in highly artistic relief all the previously mentioned decorations. These borders are not as rich nor as beautiful as some others in the Barberini collection, but they rank among the most important historically because they bear the crown and arms of the Barberini family and those of Royal France and Navarre.

The crossed letters XP make the monogram which expresses the name of Christ in Greek letters ($\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$) by the use of the first two letters of that name combined together. This is one of the earliest monograms known in Christian symbolism. It appears on many of the tombs of the ancient martyrs in the catacombs at Rome.

